

# You can't do magic

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Before the Furrries became Furious and the Tribbles got into serious Trubble they starred in a lesser-known Amiga game called Fuzzball. It was developed by Norwegian outfit, Scangames, and published in November 1991 by System 3. Spawned by the bodged spell of a naive, reckless sorcerer's apprentice, the critters multiplied like soggy mogwais, vaulting free from the imprisonment of their ancient, mystical chest.



Attempting to reverse the crisis the enigmatically unnamed upstart casts another spell... digging an even bigger coffin-shaped hole for himself. Rather than contain the outbreak of vicious, wily furballs, he joins their ranks following a rather inconvenient, accidental transformation.

Anywho, wizardry-mentor bloke returns to his castle abode, more than a bit miffed to discover it has been overrun with an army of feisty, hairball troublemakers. As a punishment, he refuses to remedy his underling's predicament until he's traipsed through 50 single-screen levels eradicating the bothersome plague.



Unexpectedly armless and legless - looking distinctly like a promotional pom-pom with googly eyes and felt feet - we'll have to step in to save the day by taking the reigns... erm, I mean *joystick*. No wonder he's got the blues - I'm useless at this! 'Challenging' doesn't begin to cover it.



Controls are of the usual up to jump, fire to shoot variety; as logical and simple as it gets. Jumping can be finely tuned depending on how forceful you are with the joystick, and our hirsute protagonist can even be manoeuvred back and forth mid-air as he falls back down to the ground as though he's been fitted with a propeller.

Fuzzball verses Fuzzball roadshow, you show 'em who's boss by blasting the mirror images of yourself into submission with your mini fur pellets. They crumple on impact, temporarily deactivated and vulnerable to a deadly head bounce. Do it quickly enough and they're goners. Otherwise, you can expect them to reanimate and hound you into an early grave with more voracity than a pig in a Thornton's factory. What? They're not the same kind of truffles? Well, the point still stands, 'Sometimes They Come Back'.

Over time *they* gradually get angrier and more intelligent, cycling the colour spectrum to prove it. From green, they escalate their level of menace through purple, black, and finally red. Ferocity aside colour determines the number of points you snag for dispatching the Fuzzballs; the more wound up they become, the greater the points cache earned. Except for the red ones which explode without delivering a reward at all.

Your ultimate goal on each level is to collect all the gems, (optionally) clear the screen of baddies (for a hefty bonus), and make a sharp exit. Some of the jewels you'll find are squirrelled away in dead-end, inescapable pits, so you must plan carefully to collect those last to avoid becoming trapped and forced to restart.



Speaking of which, regeneration points are few and far between, obliging you to retrace your steps from ground zero whenever you bite the dust. Which will happen far more often than it should in a game you'd cheerfully describe as fun. Linger too long and a swarm of 'hurry-up' wasps or bats burst loose to rush you into making a stupid mistake. As if I needed any help! Combine them with the frustration of the slippery-slidey ice level and a one-weapon arsenal that can only be engaged while putting yourself in harm's way, and you're *really* up the creek.

Are we starting to see a pattern forming? I'll give you a clue. Two words. First word *excessive*, second word *difficulty*.

Pixel perfect precision is a necessity when jumping and you can only leap when fully on terra firma. Taking a breather in-between to psych yourself up to it. That's not poetic license -

there's actually a delay before you can spring into action again.

Couple that with unresponsive controls, an artificial time limit, lethal 'power-ups', and your propensity for instant death upon enemy contact, and you have a recipe for fur and sanity loss.

Some solace can at least be taken from the two-player versus mode, delightfully illustrated yet minimally animated introduction and marginally more generous than premium price tag of £19.99. With 50 tough levels to tackle it's certainly value for money, even if you *do* have to cheat to experience them all.

Under your *own* steam, you may never get to appreciate all the toil that went into applying the finishing sheen to an already polished product.



Not every foe is a Fuzzball, they diversify along with the scenery, some expanding to three times the size of the standard ones. Such as the bodyless walking clown heads with oversized hands, and equally stunted trolls.



Even some of the ones that *are* Fuzzballs are varied enough to be considered separate entities. There are some that look more like Furbys, cool ones, demonic ones, and even skull-capped Jewish ones with movie star eyelashes. Then there are the penguin Fuzzballs, my personal favourite. Whatever they are, each flinches and slows as it recoils when absorbing a hit.

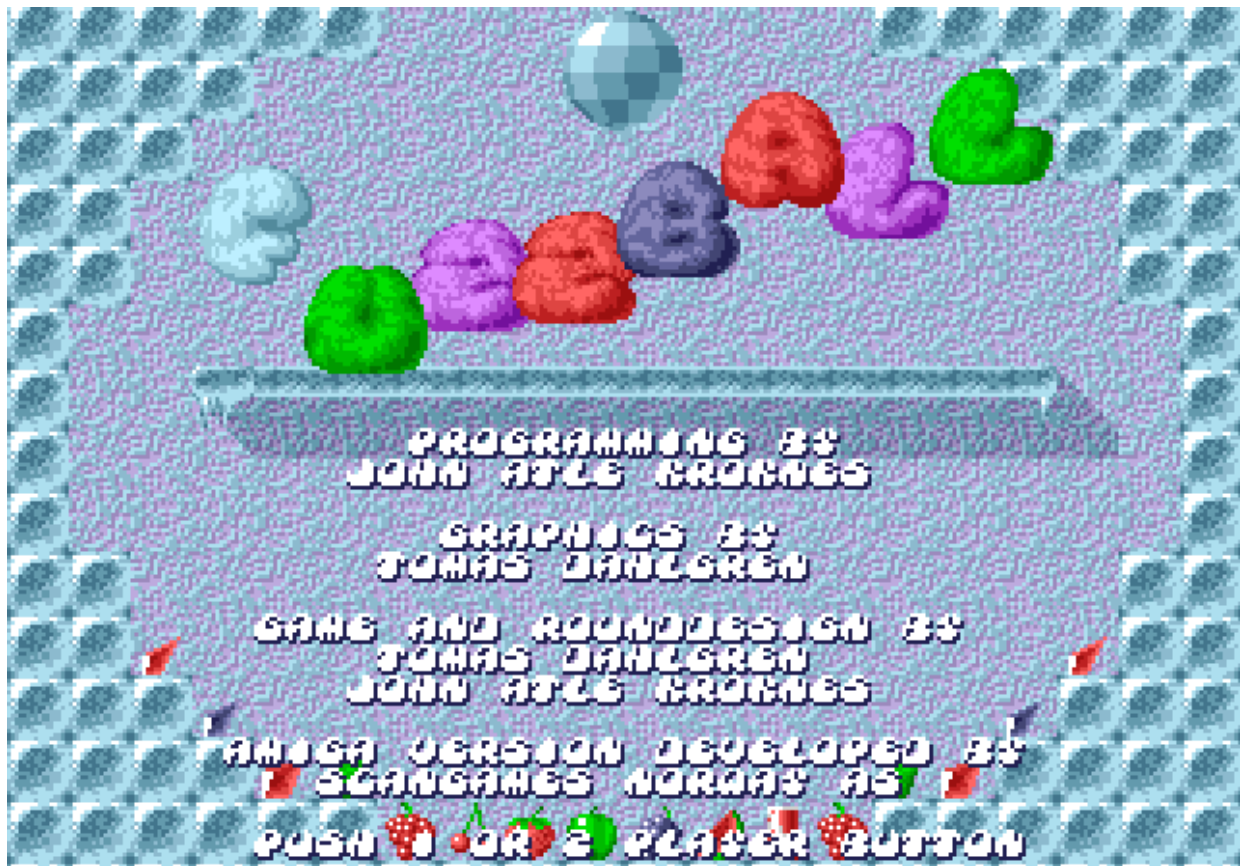




Others appear to have escaped straight out of the demo scene. The beautifully animated rotating 3D cubes, and prancing, spinning coins, for instance. Also, a pleasant surprise are the bouncing balls powered by convincing physics. They squish upon contact with the ground, expand back into shape on the ascent and accelerate/decelerate at the key moments. Less diligent developers would stick a solid blob in there and have it move along a fixed path, at a constant speed. And it would look just like a 'My First AMOS Project' effort.

Music too harmonises with the environment, and definitely doesn't let the side down. It has an arcadey, synthesised vibe that would feel right at home blasted out of the Commodore 64's SID chip. It nearly *was* too, only Fuzzball is sadly a C64 'Game That Wasn't', despite the release of a playable preview.





The demo-esque graphical effects and music are in fact no coincidence seeing as several members of the Fuzzball team were at the time current members of the demo scene...

Coder and graphician John Atle Kroknes (Lord Strangelove of Razor 1911)

Graphician Tomas Dahlgren (Uncle Tom of SCX^RZR/Titan of North Star)

Musician and graphician John Carehag (Ziphoid of Razor 1911)

Graphicians Robin Levy and Phil Thornton, and coder Dave Collins, *weren't* part of the demo scene, but are no less talented. You only have to look at their contribution to Ruff 'n' Tumble, Putty, Last Ninja 3 and Myth to see that.

Intricate detail and superb music apart, Fuzzball is an entertaining game... in *theory*. Regrettably, *not* so much in the execution. Incidentally, a word that will weigh heavily on your mind as each session fittingly concludes with your sudden, torturous demise, and the offer to repeat the misery ad infinitum.